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*Presented to Rev J. K. Clarke with the
respects of the Author
Rob Forre*

reat Encouragement to Perseverance in Missionary Labours.

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A

SERMON,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NORTHERN MISSIONARY SOCIETY,

AT

THEIR ANNUAL MEETING IN LANSINGBURGH,

SEPTEMBER 9, 1815.

AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST.

By ROBERT FORREST,

Minister of the Gospel, Stamford, Delaware County, State of New-York.

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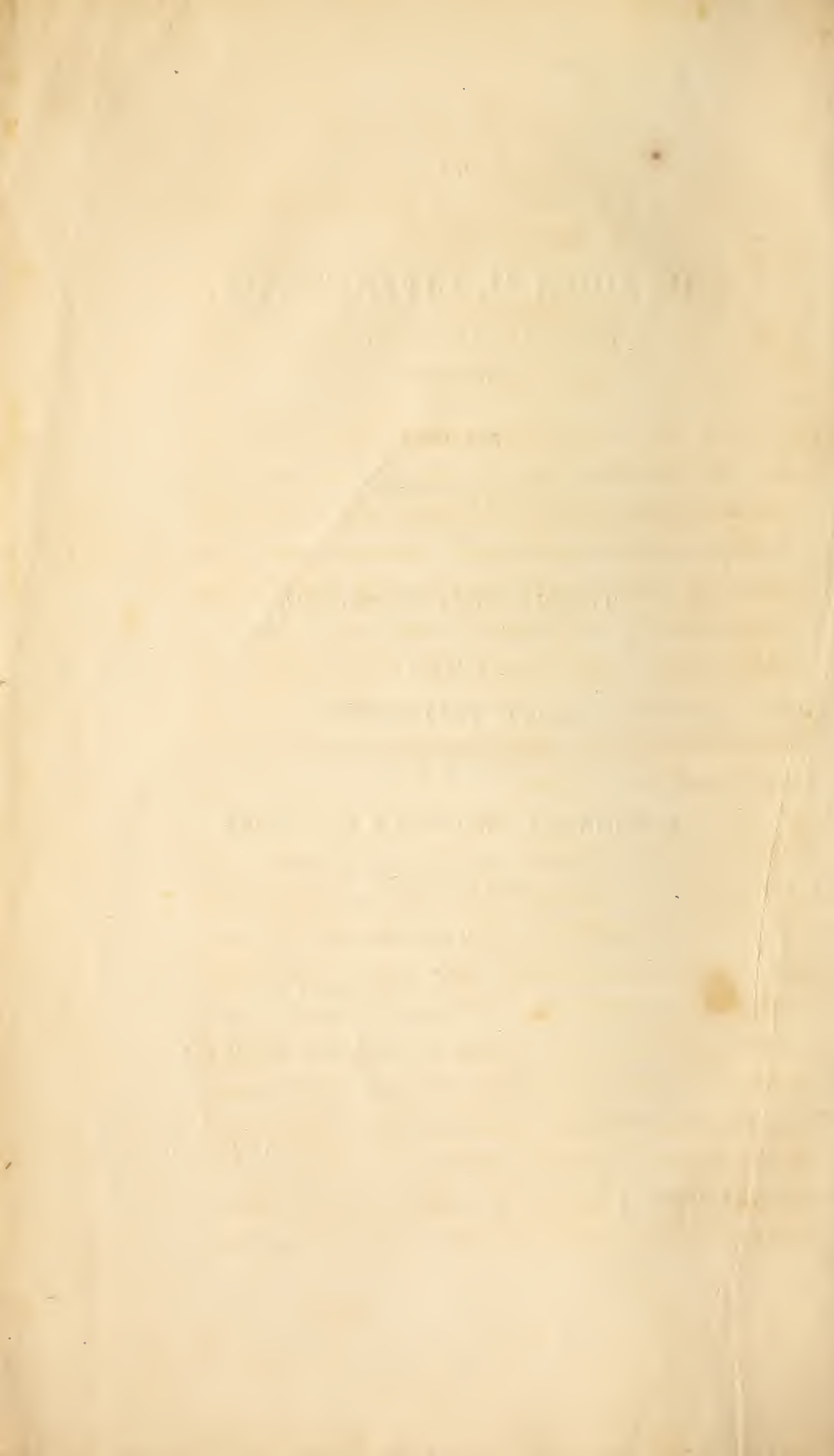


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TO
THE REVEREND
DR. JOHN H. LIVINGSTON,
PRESIDENT OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE
NEW-JERSEY,
NOT MORE
DISTINGUISHED
FOR
THEOLOGICAL LEARNING,
THAN FOR
ZEAL IN THE INTERESTS
OF
MISSIONARY AND BIBLE SOCIETIES,
THIS DISCOURSE
IS INSCRIBED,
IN TESTIMONY OF
THE RESPECT AND AFFECTION
OF THE
AUTHOR.

STAMFORD, }
Sept. 1815. }



A SERMON.

JOHN iv. 35—38.

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

THIS passage contains a species of parable delivered to the disciples in the vicinity of Sychar, a city of the Samaritans. The woman of Samaria, with whom our Lord had been lately conversing, having been convinced of sin and brought to the knowledge of the truth, had gone to publish to the citizens the great things she had seen and heard. The disciples were just returned from the city where they had gone to purchase provisions, and they addressed Christ, ‘*Master, eat.*’ He answered, ‘*I have meat to eat that ye know not of.*’ This answer was

evidently dictated in a great measure from the pleasing prospect he had of the conversion of the Samaritans; for he immediately added, '*Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest?*' It was now about the time of the winter solstice, four months before harvest, in the land of Palestine. Do you not say, in four months there will be harvest? But '*look on the fields for they are white already to harvest.*' To what harvest? The spiritual harvest—it was ready to commence. The common opinion respecting the meaning of these words, is certainly correct. 'That our Lord now directed the attention of the disciples to the inhabitants of Samaria, who, excited by the report of the woman, were coming in crowds to enquire after him as the promised Messiah.'

The conversion of the Samaritans was the first ripe fruits of that harvest soon to be reaped among the Gentile nations; and Christ seems to refer in general to the conversion of the heathen in that new dispensation which was about to commence. Messiah visiting Samaria was a proof that he was '*a light to lighten the Gentiles,*' and the conversion of sinners in that city was a pledge of the conversion of multitudes of the heathen, by the ministrations of his apostles. Christ intimates to the disciples that while it was their honour and felicity to be reapers in this harvest, gathering in souls into eternal life,

they ought to remember that the fields had been sowed by others. ‘*Ye are entered into their labours.*’ And therefore the honour and profit were not exclusively their own. There seems here to be a reference to the labours of Old Testament prophets, who foretold the coming Messiah, and called sinners to repentance—to the labours of John Baptist who came to prepare the way of the Lord—and perhaps to Christ’s personal ministry.* Those labourers were only sowing seed, they saw little fruit of their labours while with the church on earth; it was reserved for others to be reapers when God would pour out his Spirit according to his promise. But says our Lord, ‘the labours of your predecessors shall not be forgotten, they shall have their reward, they shall have as much reason to rejoice in the harvest, as you have. They have laboured and you have entered upon their labours.’

We are met this day to plead the cause of missions to the Heathen, and the truth here presented afford us the greatest encouragement. † Twenty years

* Vide Lampe in loco.

† The Missionary Society of London, the parent of the Associations in different parts of Europe, and the United States, was formed Sept. 22, 23, 24, 1795. The ship *Duff*, Capt. James Wilson, with twenty-nine Missionaries, sailed from Spithead, for the South Sea Islands, Sept. 23, 1796. ‘This singular vessel, the first, it is supposed, ever solely employed in so glorious an undertaking, since the creation of the world, has realized the fancy of the poet,

——erit altera quæ vehat Argo
Delectos heroas’——

elapse this month, since Associations began to be formed upon a large scale, in different parts, of the Protestant churches, for the purpose of conveying the gospel to heathen lands. Connected with those motives which at all times and under every circumstance will excite the friends of Christianity to put the heathen in possession of the word of life, the Church in the present age was powerfully excited by the hope of the millennium, and with an holy ambition, the saints were desirous to be found preparing God a way upon the earth.

That there will be a period of long duration, before the end of time, when the Christian religion shall be known and professed by all nations, when wars shall cease, when the influence of spiritual foes shall be greatly abridged, when evangelical purity shall adorn the sentiments, dispositions, and manners of all ranks, and that this blessed period is fast approaching, is a subject so clearly predicted, that with very few exceptions, it has been the general belief of the Christian world.

It is, however, the opinion of many, that missionary labours are attended with little or no success.*

* To fail here is more honourable than to succeed in most other pursuits. Will it tinge our cheeks with shame when we are laid on a death-bed, that we were strenuously engaged in an unsuccessful effort to spread the knowledge of Christ among the Heathen? or will it cover us with blushes when we approach the throne of God, at the judgment, to have it said by an attending

That some of the attempts to propagate the gospel among the Heathen have failed, either in whole or in part, is admitted; but success has attended many: as in the missions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, among the Indians of the Southern States: the missions of the New-York Society among the Tuscaroras, and of this Society among the Oneidas. The London Society have been very successful in Southern Africa,* the Edinburgh, in the Russian dominions, near the Caspian Sea, and the Baptists, in British India. But admitting, for the sake of argument, that success has been far less than it is actually found to be, have we not as much encouragement to proceed, as the first day we stepped forward in this glorious work? We are here informed that the predecessors of the Apostles were unsuccessful, but they were sowing precious seed which was not permitted to perish.

We shall *accommodate* the passage to the design of our present meeting. And shall endeavour to shew

spirit, "This man was an ardent supporter of an unsuccessful society, whose object was to bring the Heathen to seek salvation through the blood of the Redeemer's cross."

Bogue's Sermon at the formation of the Missionary Society of London, p. 156.

* Pleasing accounts are said to have been lately received from the Missionaries in the South Sea Islands. The author has had the pleasure of visiting the Missions in this State, among the Tuscaroras and the Oneidas, and has been an eye witness to their success.

you, that the work of propagating Christianity among the Heathen, is sowing fields in which shall be reaped a rich harvest before the end of the world—and our reward when this harvest shall be reaped by others.

I. The work of propagating Christianity among the Heathen, is sowing fields where a rich harvest shall be reaped before the end of the world.

1. *The means which are now employed have been already blessed, and shall certainly continue to be blessed for the conversion of some of the Heathen, and their introduction into the Church of God, who shall be instrumental in transmitting the truth to future generations.*

Wherever God has elect vessels he will send his gospel ; it is the means he has instituted for bringing them to himself. And it is probable that the gospel is very seldom sent to any people where there are not some ordained to enjoy salvation with eternal glory ! We may reasonably expect to hear of the conversion of some of the Heathen. We have ground to believe that by the labours of this society, some have been brought to the knowledge of the truth. Admitting that the number is small, will not the value of a few immortal souls fully repay all the money you may have expended ;—all your labours for this society,—and, all your anxieties for the conversion

of the Heathen ?* But the conversion of a few of the Heathen in the present day, is an object of great magnitude in another point of view. Here seed is sown not to perish in the earth. Converts among the Heathen will certainly employ the most serious, and the most earnest endeavours, to engage their children to serve the God of their fathers.† We may reasonably hope that their labours will be accompanied with the divine blessing, for God has instituted this method for transmitting religion from one generation to another. *‘I know Abraham, said the Lord, that he will command his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.’‡* Do we not find that the pious instructions of Abraham had a happy influence not only upon Isaac and Jacob, but upon their posterities for many ages? Do we not find that although at certain seasons religion seemed almost to have perished from among the seed of Abraham, yet God

* The Northern Missionary Society have a Christian Congregation among the Oneida Indians, where the seals of God’s covenant are regularly dispensed. The number of communicants is above thirty.

† No people on earth discover greater affection and attachment to their children than the North American Indians. What may we not expect when this disposition is sanctified by divine grace? In the History of the Moravian Missions, we have several accounts of the pleasant deaths of Indian children, who probably received their ideas of religion from their parents.

‡ Gen. xviii. 19.

never suffered it to become extinct. ‘*He remembered his holy promise, and his servant Abraham.*’

Some of the Indian tribes among whom we have brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus, are disposed to admire and to imitate the arts of civilized nations. Others retain their former customs and remove further into the wilderness ‘traversing the forest in quest of the uncertain prey.’ But whatever may be their political circumstances, the happy influence of their religious education, will be seen and felt even in remote ages. It is worthy of observation, that although we do not read of the good effects of Abraham’s instructions upon Ishmael, nor of Isaac’s instructions upon Esau, yet it is manifest that Job and his friends inhabited a country which was far from being destitute of the knowledge of the true God. They were the descendants of Esau whose posterity as well as that of Ishmael, settled in Arabia. Thus we see God by the unseen operations of his Providence, preserving the knowledge of salvation from being utterly extinguished from among the posterity of his servant.* The instructions and pious example of Abraham, had a powerful effect in the glorious revivals of religion in after ages.

These considerations certainly afford us great encouragement even upon the supposition that the Missionary spirit may decline. The universal spread of

* Vide Lawson’s Sermons on the Education of Children.

Christianity in the latter days, will certainly be a progressive work. The word of truth accompanied with the power of the Spirit, shall gradually prevail until error and vice are banished from the world. When the Lord shall be pleased to pour out his Spirit, the happy effects of religious habits and religious instruction, will be seen and felt. Such things indeed, give no claim to the divine mercy, yet under these circumstances men are more likely to become partakers of divine grace, than where such things are unknown. Of those who are now converted by the gospel and prove the most steady Christians, 'whose firmness may be counted upon in the hour of trial,' the far greater part were dedicated to God in infancy, and have been trained up in the knowledge of his truth.

2. *We put the Heathen in possession of the Scriptures which shall be found highly useful in preparing the nations for the glory of the latter days. Something analogous to this having been actually employed by God when he introduced the gospel dispensation.**

The circulation of the scriptures in the languages of the Heathen nations, is one primary object in the Missionary Associations of the Reformed Churches. Some of the Missionary Societies aided by Bible Societies, have already done considerable in the pro-

* Vide Prideaux's Connections, Edward's History of Redemption, &c.

execution of this design.* This Society will not be behind others in the important work, whenever circumstances shall permit them. Our sister Society in this State, it is said, have turned their attention to this subject, and they will naturally look to us as well as Bible Societies, for co-operation.† The experience of our Moravian Brethren and others, evince that no great difficulty can arise from the want of a written language among the Indian tribes.

The effect produced by the reading of the Scrip-

* The Baptists Society, and the Missionary Societies of London and of Edinburgh. Our Moravian Brethren also have paid attention to this subject; more than sixty years ago they had translated several portions of scripture into the Delaware and Mahikan languages. Vide Loskiel's History of Missions. Part 2. p. 154.

† The Society at this meeting appointed a Committee to correspond with their Brethren in New-York upon this subject. They have printed a translation of Dr. Blatchford's Address to the Indians, by Mr. Eleazar Williams. Mr. W. is the son of a Chief of the Iroquois nation, among whom he has constantly lived, except during the time he has been engaged in acquiring his English education. It is contemplated by the Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in this State to employ Mr. W. as 'a School-master Catechist and Lay Reader' among the Indian Tribes: and also to furnish the Indians with portions of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, in their own language. The translation is to be printed under the superintendence of Mr. W. But why not unite with other Christian denominations and translate the whole scriptures into these languages? The most respectable members of the Episcopalian Church in England are at this day, the chief supporters of Bible Societies, formed in every respect upon the plan of those now in operation in this country.

tures where men are not favoured with public teaching, cannot indeed, in ordinary cases, be compared with the full enjoyment of the divine word and divine ordinances. We may have heard of the conversion of individuals, but we never heard of the conversion of a multitude by the mere reading of the scriptures. But it is not our intention to send the scriptures alone among the Heathen, but as coupled with public teaching. For the sake of argument however, let us suppose that we merely give them the word of God, and teach them to read it. The existence of the Scriptures among the Heathen, under these circumstances, is an object of great magnitude for the future enlargement of the Church.*

* The following anecdote was related at a late meeting of the Aberdeen Bible Society (in Scotland) by the Rev. Mr. Grant, one of the Ministers of the Orkney Islands, who was an eye-witness of the scene. "Last year a Swedish vessel was driven upon our coast in a tremendous gale, and went to pieces. All on board perished, except one man, who was driven on shore upon a piece of the wreck, entwined among the ropes, *Half naked and half drowned*. As soon as the people rescued him, astonishment filled their minds, by observing a small parcel tied firmly round his waist with a handkerchief. Some of them concluded it was his money—others, it was the ship's papers, &c. To their astonishment, it was his Bible; a Bible given to the lad's father, from the British and Foreign Bible Society. Upon the blank leaf was a prayer written, that the Lord would make the present gift the means of saving his son's soul. Upon the other blank leaf was an account how the Bible came into the old man's hands, and a tribute of gratitude to the Society. The request was that the son should make it the man of his counsel; and that he could not

We find that something similar to this, actually contributed in a high degree, to the diffusion of Christianity in the Apostolic age. After the Babylonish captivity, many of the Jews (though permitted by Cyrus) did not return to their own land, but remained in the Persian empire, where in consequence of civil revolutions, they were soon scattered from India to Ethiopia. In this state they continued till the coming of Christ. These Jews, in their dispersion, retained their religion, and carried with them copies of the law and of some of the prophets.—They communicated to the Heathen, some of the leading truths of divine revelation, particularly the promises respecting Messiah.

Along with these oral instructions, a considerable part of the world was soon favoured with the Old Testament, in the Greek language. Many of the Jews in their dispersion, having in a great measure lost their own language, the Septuagint translation was formed for their use, in a language as well understood in the countries bordering upon Palestine, as the French is, at this day, in the commercial nations of Europe.

Many of the Heathen nations had, therefore, in some measure, the word of God in their hands.

allow him to depart from home, without giving him the best pledge of his love, a Bible ; though that gift deprived the other parts of the family. The Bible bore evident marks of being often read with tears."

And what was the consequence? We find an expectation of the coming of Christ; Jews and Gentiles were prepared to hear of new and strange events.* And in many places where the apostles went preaching the gospel, they found men ready to sift their principles by the Old Testament scriptures. In consequence of these things, the labours of the apostles were greatly abridged in many places where they were called to preach the gospel. Supernatural efficacy did then accompany the gospel, and must always accompany it wherever it is successful: but the Holy Spirit deals with men, as rational creatures, informing the understanding, and affecting the heart, by means of the divine word.

If the circulation of the word of God, in a very

* In proof of this, we present the testimonies of two Roman Historians, Suetonius and Tacitus. The words of Suetonius are these: "Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut Judæâ profecti rerum potirentur:" i. e. *There was an ancient and general opinion, famous through all the Eastern parts, that the Fates had determined, that there should come out of Judea those who should govern the world.* The testimony of Tacitus is equally explicit—"Pluribus persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum libris contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, ut valesceret oriens, profectique Judæâ rerum potirentur" i. e. *Many were persuaded that it was contained in the ancient books of the priests, that at that time the East should prevail, and that they who should govern the world, were to come out of Judea.* By the ancient books of the priests is certainly meant Old Testament prophecies. The last expression is the same with that of Suetonius, and evidently taken from Micah v. 2. Vide Sueton. Ernest. Lip. 1738. p. 438. Taciti. Hist. lib. 5. c. 13.

partial manner, was so useful in an age of miracles and of inspiration, what may we reasonably expect from the present exertions of Missionary and Bible Societies, in diffusing the Scriptures throughout the world? It seems to be a part of the divine plan, that before any great revival of religion, God prepares the way for a more general acquaintance with the Scriptures. It is well known how much Luther's translation of the Bible in Germany, and Tyndale's translation in England, contributed to advance the interests of the Reformation, but it was the art of printing which afforded facilities for this purpose. The invention of this art preceded the Reformation little more than 60 years.* By circulating the word of God among the Heathen, we are not therefore sowing seed to perish in the earth. When God shall be pleased 'to pour water on the thirsty,' it shall be manifest that we have not laboured in vain.

3. *We are preparing an asylum for the saints, should the Lord be pleased to remove his Gospel from nations now distinguished for spiritual privileges.*

It is not our intention at present to enter upon an

* Printing was invented at Strasburgh, by John Guttenburg, A. D. 1440; the Reformation commenced early in the following century. When we read the curious facts which are recorded by the Historians of the middle ages, relative to the high price of the Scriptures; the punishments to which men were exposed very often when found reading them, and recollect the felicity of our own time, what gratitude do we not owe to the sovereign disposer of all things.

examination of those predictions which evidently relate to the sufferings of the Protestant European Nations and Churches, previous to the commencement of the millennium. Did the time permit, we might show, that the witnesses are not yet slain ; that 'mourning, and lamentation, and woe' are written in that flying roll which passes swiftly over the nations which have at any time 'given their power and strength unto the beast.' That it is highly probable the time is fast approaching, when multitudes of the saints in those countries, deprived of all their outward privileges, shall be forced to seek refuge in foreign climes. But behold the Lord by Missionary labours in the east and west, and north and south, among nations which never bowed to the authority of Antichrist, providing chambers of safety for his people 'until the indignation be over-past.' When that day arrives, the Heathen tribes will know the hearts of strangers, for they were once themselves spiritual strangers.

We readily admit that this consideration is not exclusively an encouragement to missionary labours among the Heathen. It is a powerful inducement to spread the knowledge of salvation in the United States ; we have never, as a nation, supported the power of Antichrist. Independent of our labours among the Indians, this Society have for some time past, sent missionaries to labour in different parts of

the country, which are destitute of the means of grace. Pleasing intelligence is frequently received of the success of these missions.

II. Our reward when this harvest shall be reaped by others.

Then ‘he that soweth, and he that reapeth, shall rejoice together.’ It is evident that Christ does not refer in this place, to the joy of his servants at the general judgment, when the full effects of their labours are exhibited to all rational creatures. But to the joy of Old Testament prophets, John Baptist, and others when the apostles should have great success in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. But how could Old Testament prophets, and John Baptist, rejoice in the success of the apostles, when they were not present? And how shall we rejoice in the latter day glory, when we shall then be asleep with our fathers?

We may certainly infer from these words, *That the Church in heaven is well acquainted with the circumstances of the Church in this world, and that during any period of the Church’s prosperity on earth, there will be additional happiness to those in heaven who may have one day contributed to forward this glorious work.*

The Church in heaven is certainly well acquainted with the circumstances of the Church on earth, by means of the ministrations of Holy Angels and the frequent arrivals of kindred spirits redeemed from

the earth. Whether the Saints in glory have any other mode of being acquainted with the affairs of this world, is a question which we are not competent to answer. The Holy Angels are well acquainted with the state of the Church in this world; here they are constantly employed on business which concerns the heirs of salvation. They are deeply interested in the prosperity of the Church, there is joy among the Angels at the conversion of sinners. The Holy Angels will be able to inform the Saints now engaged in the various parts of Missionary duty, and they will do it with pleasure: That the seed they had sowed has not perished, as they often feared, but is producing in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some an hundred fold: That the handful of corn they had cast on the tops of the mountains, is now shaking like the trees of Mount Lebanon.

In heaven there will be arrivals every day, yea every hour from all parts of this globe, and there will be no want of religious intelligence of the most interesting and the most agreeable nature. Some will be constantly entering the heavenly mansions, who will congratulate you for your now despised labours to the Indian tribes, and to be your crowns of rejoicing for ever.

Connected with these things we may also observe, that the memory of men now engaged in any of the departments of Missionary labors, will be ex-

ceeding precious in this world during the happy days of the church. We embalm the memory, and are disposed to make many enquiries (from a principle of laudable curiosity) respecting those who may have been the honoured instruments of introducing the gospel into our country, or into the place where we first received religious impressions.

At the formation of the Missionary Society of London, one of the members expressed a sentiment upon this subject which is congenial to the Christian mind;—"O that we knew the names of those who introduced the gospel into the Island of Britain—We shall know them in heaven." Of such we are disposed to say like David on another occasion,—“Is there any yet left of the house of Saul that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” On the banks of the Missouri, and on the shores of the Pacific, after ages have elapsed, I see crowds of Christian Indians with grateful emotions relating your labours of love, and sedulously enquiring if there yet remains any of the descendants of the men of this Association, that they may shew them kindness for their fathers’ sake.

It is probable that in the days of the millennium, no part of church history (except that of our redemption) will be so interesting as the labours of Missionary and Bible Societies. Brethren, your names will be enrolled in the annals of fame, among mar-

tyrs and reformers, and the benefactors of our world. In those days when religion will command all the efforts of human genius, and all the stores of human literature, the transactions of this 'Æra of Christian benevolence' may be exhibited (even to the man of mere taste and science) with inconceivably more sublimity and beauty, than any thing now to be found in the Historian's page, or the Poet's line.

But pardon me, brethren, I will not for a moment harbour the thought that you are influenced by no higher motives than the love of posthumous fame. Having tasted that the Lord is gracious, you will be excited in your Missionary labours from zeal for the glory of a redeeming God, and compassion for a perishing world.

In making another appeal to your Christian liberality, to enable to carry on this work of the Lord, we trust that none present will be disposed to object, "We have long contributed to this institution, and we are tired." Is not God's goodness to you more than commensurate with your liberality, while this work is the cause of God, and shall assuredly prosper? You profess to believe the testimony of God concerning his Son, and to have committed to him the salvation of your souls, and do you not believe that God's word will be verified in every particular? Has he not said there is that giveth yet encreaseth? It is true, we do not look for perfection in this world, but



surely the least that we can expect is some degree of consistency. But it is very difficult to perceive this where men profess to confide their eternal happiness to the Lord Jesus, and refuse to trust him with their temporal concerns. “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully, every man according as he purposed in his heart, so let him give not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.*” ‘Christ has loved us and given himself for us,’ therefore we will ‘honor him with our substance’ and to zealous exertions we will join fervent prayers—‘Let thy way be known upon the earth, thy saving health among all nations.’† And let the whole earth be filled with thy glory. Amen and Amen.‡

* 2 Cor. ix. 6—8.

† Ps. lxxii. 2.

‡ Ps. lxxii. 19.

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